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The Special Groups

Blacks Dubious About Role in Corporations

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HOW serious are major corporations about hiring and upgrading black Americans? In a survey, 1,300 chief executive officers of the nation's top 1,000 corporations said that they had a greater commitment to these aims than ever before. But in another survey, of 303 black executives, doubts were expressed that the potential of long-term growth for blacks within their companies would equal the potential for whites.

Civil rights specialists in employment say that most major American corporations are simply paying "lip service" to affirmative action, designed to equalize opportunities for minority groups and women. They insist that Department of Labor statistics fail to corroborate the commitment of the executives to the hiring and upgrading of blacks.

Neither survey evaluated the controversial issue, previously reported on by the National Urban League, of the impact that blacks feel working white women are having on their employment; nor the fact, say such black executive recruiters as Charles L. Fields, president of Fields, Freeman Associates Inc., that many blacks have been reluctant to make the "necessary" effort to "get involved in the total white society" to the point of "joining the country club and the old-boy network."

Scores of corporations and government agencies pay for space in the industrial shows that are a part of the annual conventions of national civil rights organizations, and they actively vie for prospective minority-group employees in these forums.

Several of the 47 employers listed in the National Urban League's industrial show called a "Showcase for Commitment to Equal Opportunity," held in New York in August, also took part in the convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Miami Beach and the Chicago convention of Image Inc., a national employment program organized by Spanish-speaking groups.

The results were varied. Recruiters said these well-attended affairs constituted a small part of their total outreach for minority groups, and none could tell how many persons were hired through them. But the meetings provided a positive image and brought their organizations into contact with a large number

of educated and skilled prospects and their families, according to the recruiters.

The New York Life Insurance Company, recruiting for the first time at the Urban League's meeting, accepted more than 200 employment applications during four days, a spokesman said.

Rolfe Jenkins, manager of corporate communications for the Kellogg Company, said that although its conference recruiting was "marginally effective," most of its minority-group professional and technical staff came from a college-recruitment program.

Caesars World Inc., parent company for gambling establishments in Nevada, Florida and New Jersey, found that most of the applications taken at the black and Spanish-speaking conferences were from people interested in financial management and similar positions. Manual Nieves, director of equal employment and affirmative action, said that only a few of the scores of applications received last summer sought "employment as dealers or croupiers."

And Omega J. C. Ware, director of equal-employment opportunity of the Central Intelligence Agency, said that "no matter what the numerical results, the process was effective for us." He said the exposure helped to dispel ignorance about the C.I.A.

"Had we not gone to civil rights groups and to colleges," Mr. Ware said, "our minority applications would be very small. When we make ourselves available, we find minority professionals are just as interested in opportunities at our agency as whites are."

In their thinking, civil rights groups do not give the black corporate executive a priority consideration because they are employed and the major black focus must be on the young blacks who are in danger of becoming a permanently unemployed underclass.

Blacks in the corporate world constitute a small minority of both the black community and the business world. Department of Labor statistics show that blacks in management areas of the labor market had increased nationally from 2.4 percent of the total in 1958 to 4.8 percent two decades later.

In its survey of 1,300 business leaders, Reynolds Associates Inc., an executive-recruiting concern, found that 62 percent of those questioned said their companies' commitment to affirmative-action hiring was greater today than five years ago. And 43 percent said the same was true for their industries.

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